

Jonah Explained & Applied 32

Ger de Koning



The Book of Jonah

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Grace

Ger de Koning

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen – Genesis

Exo – Exodus

Lev – Leviticus

Num – Numbers

Deu – Deuteronomy

Jos – Joshua

Jdg – Judges

Rth – Ruth

1Sam – First Samuel

2Sam – Second Samuel

1Kgs – First Kings

2Kgs – Second Kings

1Chr – First Chronicles

2Chr – Second Chronicles

Ezra – Ezra

Neh – Nehemiah

Est – Esther

Job – Job

Psa – Psalms

Pro – Proverbs

Ecc – Ecclesiastes

Song – Song of Songs

Isa – Isaiah

Jer – Jeremiah

Lam – Lamentations

Eze – Ezekiel

Dan – Daniel

Hos – Hosea

Joel – Joel

Amos – Amos

Oba – Obadiah

Jona – Jonah

Mic – Micah
Nah – Nahum
Hab – Habakkuk
Zep – Zephaniah
Hag – Haggai
Zec – Zechariah
Mal – Malachi

New Testament

Mt – Gospel of Matthew
Mk – Gospel of Mark
Lk – Gospel of Luke
Jn – Gospel of John
Acts – Acts of the Apostles
Rom – Letter to the Romans
1Cor – First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor – Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal – Letter to the Galatians
Eph – Letter to the Ephesians
Phil – Letter to the Philippians
Col – Letter to the Colossians
1Thes – First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes – Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim – First Letter to Timothy
2Tim – Second Letter to Timothy
Tit – Letter to Titus
Phlm – Letter to Philemon
Heb – Letter to the Hebrews
Jam – Letter of James
1Pet – First Letter of Peter
2Pet – Second Letter of Peter
1Jn – First Letter of John
2Jn – Second Letter of John
3Jn – Third Letter of John
Jude – Letter of Jude
Rev – Revelation

Explanation of General Format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

The book of Jonah

Introduction

Preface

Jonah is the fifth in the row of the twelve minor prophets. In the four chapters of his book, we get to know a prophet who values his own importance more than the importance of God.

But more than the prophet, we get to know the God of this prophet. Although Jonah is not obedient, God does not put him aside. Jonah gets a second chance from God. Jonah finally does what God has asked him to do, although still not wholeheartedly. His selfishness continues to prevail. Still God does not push Jonah aside, but teaches him new lessons.

We are allowed to listen, not as spectators, but as persons concerned, because Jonah is in all of us. The message that the book of the prophet Jonah contains for us is not only the content of his preaching to Nineveh, but also the patience of God with our unwillingness too, to do obediently what He tells us. In this book of the Bible God shares with us His considerations to make us willing witnesses to His Name.

Middelburg, March 2006 – revised in 2018 – translated 2020

Who was Jonah?

Of the ‘minor prophets’, Jonah is undoubtedly the best known. In addition to what we find out about him in this book, we read the following in 2 Kings: “He [King Jeroboam] restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher” (2Kgs 14:25). We can conclude from this that he acts as a prophet in Israel shortly before or during the reign of Jeroboam II (793-753 BC). Further we read here about him that he is a “servant” of the LORD God and “prophet”. The Lord Jesus also speaks of him as “Jonah the prophet” (Mt 12:39).

Most probably Jonah is the author of the book of the same name. Only he can tell about what is happening on the ship (Jonah 1), about his stay in the fish (Jonah 2), about his dissatisfaction and his expressions about it against God (Jonah 4).

His name means 'dove'. He must go with a message that leads to peace – of which the dove is a symbol – to a city over which God's judgment must come. But Jonah does not act according to his name. He does not seek the peace of the city. Why he doesn't do that, we will see later.

The name of his father, Amittai, means 'reliable' or 'the truth of the LORD'. Jonah does not honor that name either. He is not reliable as a servant of the LORD. He flees his mission. But no one can escape from God. God forces him to proclaim "the truth of the LORD" to Nineveh.

He comes from Gath-hepher in Zebulun (Jos 19:13), north of Nazareth in Galilee. The remark made by the enemies of the Lord Jesus, that no prophet arises from Galilee (Jh 7:52), is therefore clearly an error.

The book of Jonah, the target of Bible criticism

The great importance that the Jews attach to the book of Jonah is shown by the fact that they read this book during the Day of Atonement. Bible critics have always had a great interest in this book. But this interest is expressed in the many attacks that have been made on the book.

It has been claimed that Jonah never lived. Others have said that Jonah's history is the product of an imaginative spirit or based on a legend. But, as someone has said, less faith is needed to accept this simple history than the many foolish assumptions made to deprive it of its supernatural character.

Every attack on the book is in fact an attack on the Lord Jesus, Who completely confirms the historicity of this book by referring to it. He does this twice (Mt 12:40-41; 16:4). In the same way He refers to many more events in the Old Testament that are called into question, such as the creation of heaven and earth in six days of 24 hours, the institution of marriage, the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

To faith, both references by the Lord Jesus are sufficient to consider the book of Jonah as belonging to the inspired Scriptures. Anyone who does not believe, or argues away His reference to it and thus questions the au-

thority of His statement about Jonah, brutally denies His Godhead. A compromise is not possible.

Jonah – James

The fact that the book of Jonah has a place in the Old Testament is just as special as the letter of James in the New Testament.

1. The Old Testament is especially dedicated to the history of God's gracious intentions with Israel. Yet in the book of Jonah we find a history of God's gracious dealings with Gentiles.

2. The New Testament unfolds God's counsels for the church. Yet in the letter of James we find a letter which is addressed to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad (Jam 1:1b), that is the whole people of Israel.

Through the book of Jonah we learn that, in the time when Israel is at the center of God's dealings, God also has a heart full of compassion for the nations outside the chosen people. The book testifies that God is also the God of the Gentiles and not only of the Jews (Rom 3:29). It is the great missionary book of the Old Testament. As far as we know Jonah is the only prophet who has been sent to the Gentiles with a message especially for the Gentiles. From the letter of James we learn that although God now forms a totally new, heavenly people, the church, from the believers of Israel and the nations, He does not forget His old earthly people Israel.

The lesson of Jonah

This book uncovers the workings of the heart of a man who is a believer and also a servant of God. The reason Jonah does not want to go to Nineveh is not because he is afraid of the city, but because he knows God. In this book God's heart is also exposed. But although Jonah knows God, he is not lined up with God's thoughts. He does not share in God's mercy. The thought of his own importance overshadows everything. Because he does not know God's heart, he does not really know God.

The book gives us a lot of insight into the character and life of the much discussed and often despised prophet. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he writes about himself in a way that man naturally does not. Without any excuse Jonah shows his own wrong mind and wrong behavior.

Would anyone have ever published such an honest account as Jonah did? Everyone in the book obtains a status better off than Jonah.

Jonah is not just anyone. Just to him the Lord has entrusted His testimony. And it is precisely in this person with such a high calling that the very low character of human nature is exposed. That low character is that he wants to be important because of the important message he has to deliver. He only wants to carry out the task he receives if he can shine through it himself. As a result of this vainness and pride, he cannot accept the fact that God is showing grace to others.

Disciples of the Lord

People with an attitude like Jonah cannot accept God revealing His thoughts or Being through anyone else. They themselves have to do the things, they have to have the honor of it. All their thoughts about God are limited to their own viewpoint. That viewpoint is that the message is entrusted to them and nobody else.

The same attitude is found with a few disciples of the Lord Jesus (Lk 9:54). When they come with the Lord in a village of the Samaritans, they are refused! That cannot be the case. Fire must come down from heaven! That is the only appropriate response to this gross insult, they are convinced of. Well, they ask the Lord because of decency. But in the meantime they have given room to the natural feelings of their hearts.

It seems as if they stand up for the Lord, but essentially they want to take revenge for this treatment because they themselves feel rejected. And executing revenge is the revelation of power. In this way they want to show that they are important, that power lies with them and not with those who refuse to receive the Lord.

Jonah: That's me

If we do not recognize anything of ourselves in Jonah and the disciples, there is no need to continue reading. Then this prophetic book contains no message for us. This book makes it clear that those who are connected with God Himself must submit to His power and bow to His grace. If that submission is not there, the awareness of God's favor leads to unfaithfulness and self-glorification.

Just like Jonah, we are able to misuse the privileges God has given us to show off. If that happens, we ourselves are often blind to it. In that case, through our behavior we darken or hide the knowledge of Who God is in Himself. An additional effect of dealing in this way with the possession of these privileges is the rise of a harsh party spirit. Just look at the Pharisees as we see them in Scripture. Then we look in a mirror again. What do we see? Anyone who knows himself a little and is honest, will admit that he encounters or finds something of the Pharisee in his own heart too.

If we read on because we want to discover something of ourselves in Jonah, and in the disciples and in the Pharisees, we will make another great discovery. Above all, we will see God showing Himself in His grace, both for Nineveh, including children and animals, and for His straying servant Jonah. Then we can apply that to ourselves as well. The result will be that we praise God for His great grace in which He has taken care of us.

A prophetic book?

It may be surprising that there is no prophecy in the book. We could say there is only one prophecy, in Jonah 3 (Jona 3:4). And that one is pronounced, that it would *not* be fulfilled. The rest of the book describes the prophet's attitude towards God and the way God goes with him.

Now the special thing about this book is that the story itself is prophecy. The story gives prophetic truths in historical form, in the form of events. The prophecy is depicted here. Jonah is a picture of Israel. An ancient orthodox Jew answered the question why Jonah is read every Day of Atonement in the synagogue: 'We are Jonah.' In the person Jonah the whole history of Israel is told.

The Lord Jesus applies what happens to Jonah to Himself in His death and resurrection (Mt 12:39-41). When He explains the sign of Jonah, He first points to His death (Mt 12:40), which He connects to Jonah's stay in the fish. Then He points to his preaching and its consequence in Nineveh (Mt 12:41). The sign of Jonah about which the Lord speaks means that after His death and resurrection the preaching will go to the Gentiles. This is a serious reproach for those to whom the Lord speaks, but who do not listen to Him.

The Lord uses the history of Jonah in the fish and his subsequent preaching as a sign of what awaits the people of Israel. They will not listen to Him Who is more than Jonah. The men of Nineveh do listen to Jonah. In the judgment, the men of Nineveh will rise up to condemn the rebellious generation to whom the Lord Jesus came. Thus the Lord gives, in relation to what happened to Jonah, a prophetic message.

The second time the Lord Jesus refers to Jonah (Mt 16:4), He does so with the intention of showing His opponents that judgment was imminent. The sign of Jonah here means that Israel was about to be thrown into the sea of nations. Matthew adds meaningfully: "And he left them and went away."

Jonah as a picture of Israel

Israel, like Jonah, was chosen by God to be His witness to the nations around them (Isa 43:10-12; 44:8). But Israel has used the truth of God which it should have proclaimed for themselves. We like the truth of God when we can cloth ourselves with it, in order to increase our own importance. This was the case with Israel. The people of Israel were the vessel of God's witness in the world and boasted in it because it clothed them with honor. For this reason they could not accept that grace was given to the Gentiles. Like Jonah, Israel was unwilling to carry out its task as a witness and was always disobedient (Jdg 2:11-19).

By fleeing, Jonah wants to escape the task of proclamation. He begrudges the great heathen world Divine mercy because he fears that the preaching of penance will save Nineveh from imminent destruction (Jona 4:2). That is precisely what he does not want. He wants those pagans to die. In this Jonah reflects the attitude of Israel toward the nations (1Thes 2:14-16).

But Jonah cannot be compared with a false prophet who prophesies from his own heart. Just as Jonah disappeared into the sea, so Israel is scattered among the nations. As a result, the nations have come to know God (Rom 11:11).

Jonah is miraculously kept in the fish. Thus God has kept Israel through all the ages and they will return to their land (Hos 3:5; Jer 30:11; 31:35-37). Jonah had to learn that he is as dependent on the grace of God as Nineveh is. Israel must also learn this (Rom 11:32).

Outline of Jonah

I The disobedient prophet (Jonah 1:1-2:10)

1. The flee (Jonah 1:1-3)
2. The storm (Jonah 1:4-6)
3. The responsibility of Jonah (Jonah 1:7-10)
4. Jonah rejected (Jonah 1:11-16)
5. The protection of Jonah (Jonah 1:17-2:1)
6. A psalm of thanksgiving (Jonah 2:2-9)
7. The liberation (Jonah 2:10)

II The aggrieved Prophet (Jonah 3:1-4:11)

1. The preaching of Jonah (Jonah 3:1-4)
2. The conversion of Nineveh (Jonah 3:5-10)
3. Displeasure of Jonah (Jonah 4:1-4)
4. God reprimands Jonah (Jonah 4:5-9)
5. The Mercy of God (Jonah 4:10-11)

Jonah 1

Introduction

Jonah wants to escape the LORD's command to preach against Nineveh. That is why he wants to flee to Tarshish. For this he finds a ship in Joppa (verses 1-3). But the LORD sends a heavy storm. The ship is in danger of perishing. Jonah is forced to acknowledge that the storm has risen because of him (verses 4-10). At the request of the crew, he indicates what needs to be done to stop the storm. When he is thrown into the sea, the sea becomes calm (verses 11-16). The LORD takes care of him further by sending a big fish that swallows him.

Jona 1:1 | The LORD Speaks

| 1 *The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying,*

This is not the first time that the word of the LORD comes to Jonah. He is no newcomer so to speak; he knew the voice of the LORD. As has already been said, he is a prophet in the time that Jeroboam II is or will soon be king. He has prophesied that lost territory of Israel will be recaptured (2Kgs 14:25).

He would have had no trouble bringing that message. That must have been a great pleasure to him. It was of course also for this Israelite in heart and soul an enormously beautiful prophecy that he was allowed to proclaim. With such a message you like to go to your peers. He will not have had the name of 'prophet of doom', as several of his fellow prophets must have had.

How the word of the LORD comes to him now is not told. That is not strange, by the way. There are many prophets who do not mention this. Somehow Jonah has become aware that the LORD wants him to go to Nineveh to preach.

Also today the Lord wants to make clear to each of His own what they should do, where they should go, what they should say. He speaks through the Word we have in our hands. If we read that prayerfully, we will hear

what He tells us. Not only do we then understand in a general sense how He wants us to live. We will also hear His specific mission that He has for each of us personally. This is not done by hearing supernatural voices, it is not a vague, emotional affair. Whoever is truly and submissive focused on the Lord when reading His Word, will understandably and clearly hear from Him through His Word what He wants.

Jona 1:2 | The Command

2 *“Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.”*

The command Jonah is now given is different from the one we read about in 2 Kings 14 (2Kgs 14:25). This time it is not a message that a person likes to take with him to the streets, it is not a message that people are waiting for and that makes the preacher an appreciated man. He must now preach doom.

That would not be pleasant if it he had to go to his own people. But he is not sent to his own people. He must go to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire. That is an ancient city. It is first mentioned in Genesis 10 (Gen 10:11). Sennacherib made the city the capital. The Medes and Persians destroyed her in 612 BC.

The fact that Jonah has to go there is certainly unique. It has not happened before, at least according to what we read in Scripture, that a prophet with a message from God has been sent to the Gentiles. But it is not for a servant of God to determine the place of his service, nor what he should preach.

The LORD makes him a partner in His motives, in order to send him to Nineveh. He tells Jonah that the wickedness of the city has come up before Him in heaven (cf. Gen 18:21; 1Sam 5:12). The good is completely missing in there. The city is corrupted through and through. For Nineveh, there is nothing left but judgment.

It is a great city because there are so many inhabitants. It is also a city with enormous wealth (Nah 2:9). The number of inhabitants and the great wealth ensure that also its power and influence on the empire, of which it is the capital, is great. Large in size is the evil of its many inhabitants who

live in revolt against God. God can no longer bear it. Judgment must be announced.

Jona 1:3 | Jonah Flees

3 But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Jonah does not like his task. This is not in itself a shocking or new phenomenon. Moses also had his objections when God called him (Exo 3:10-14; 4:1-17) and also Gideon did not jump for joy when God called him (Jdg 6:11-24). But there were other things present with them than with Jonah.

Servants of the LORD, prophets, are not machines. They can resist the will of God. With Moses and Gideon it was a feeling of inability. They did not feel able to carry out the great task they were given. In Jonah's case, it is *clear unwillingness*, based on pride. This gives Jonah the doubtful honor of being the only prophet who pertinently disobeys God, a prophet who simply refuses to follow His command.

The LORD could have stopped Jonah. Yet He lets him go, but without losing sight of him. He lets him go, as far as He finds necessary. Whoever leaves the way of obedience inevitably also leaves the presence of the Lord. Not that the Lord no longer exists for such a person, but the heart loses consciousness of His presence. Of course, it cannot be else. The Lord never goes along on a path of unfaithfulness.

Jonah's aim is certain. He doesn't go to Nineveh, but completely in the other direction, to Tarshish. It is not exactly clear where Tarshish was located. It is believed to be in Spain, in the west, while Nineveh was in the east. Why he wants exactly to go to Tarshish, is not mentioned.

He "found a ship", as we read. This indicates that he has consciously worked in his search for a means that could bring him to his willfully chosen goal. He must have seen it as a confirmation that in Joppa – that is the present Jaffa, which in the New Testament is called Joppa (Acts 9:36,43) –, he finds a ship that is about to leave for Tarshish. He has, so to speak, the wind behind, the circumstances are favorable.

Such ‘pieces of luck’ give a person who stubbornly plans to map out his own way, while he is against the Lord’s will, a wonderful feeling. We are all masters in justifying a self-willed way of doing things that we know go against the Word of God by lucky circumstances. This camouflages our disobedience to the Word of God. The fact that circumstances seem positive while on a path of disobedience is never proof of the Lord’s blessing.

The road of Jonah is the road down. He goes down to Joppa and he goes down into the ship (verse 5) and later he goes down even deeper into the sea (Jona 2:6). Joppa is said to mean ‘beauty’ or ‘submission’. ‘Beauty’ seems to be a suitable starting point, but it leads to ‘submission’, bondage. The ship that leaves there will take you while you sleep to your destination, if God does not intervene. That easy do you get out of the Lord’s presence.

The leaving of the presence of the LORD is a conscious act and therefore sin. It places Jonah in the dark company of Cain, who also left the presence of the LORD (Gen 4:16).

Maybe we shouldn’t think that Jonah wanted to hide from God. Presumably, he knew Psalm 139 well, so he knew that this was impossible (Psa 139:1-12). But on someone who consciously disobeys, the Word of God loses its powerful impact. Jonah did not want to do what God had told him to do. Therefore he left the land where God dwells. “Away from the presence of the LORD” also means “away from the land of the LORD”.

Jonah does not flee out of fear for difficulties he would face during his service, but because he is afraid that the LORD is showing grace to the city of Nineveh. As a Jew, he begrudges grace to the Gentiles. This begrudging of grace to the Gentiles we regularly encounter in the Gospels and in the book of Acts. The Pharisees become furious when the Lord Jesus in His parables refers to grace for the Gentiles (Mt 21:33-46). The Jews become furious when Paul speaks about it (Acts 22:17-22).

But it is not only the unbelieving Pharisees and Jews who show their displeasure when there is talk of grace for the Gentiles. It took effort for the Lord Jesus to convince Peter to go to a heathen (Acts 10:1-16). Fortunately, Peter was persuaded and fulfilled the calling (Acts 10:17-23). But the background is always the same: if Gentiles would accept salvation, it would

have been the end of the privileged position of Israel, to whom the LORD had, according to their conviction, revealed Himself exclusively.

As a Jew, Jonah cannot bear to see a pagan city so favored in this way and share in the mercy and salvation of God. As a prophet he can't bear that his word doesn't come true and that even before the eyes of these uncircumcised people. He must preach that God will turn the city upside down after forty days. But that will not happen if they repent. Jonah knows that. But he does not want to be seen as a false prophet. That will be the case if the city repents. His words will not come true. The city will not be turned upside down even though he preached it.

In 2 Kings 14, Jonah was chosen as the messenger to make known the mercy of God in the days when Israel sighed under the terrible yoke of the enemy (2Kgs 14:25). He was then the bringer of good news for his people. He liked to do that. But in his pride, he cannot accept a task intended only for the nations, through which they also will share in the mercy of God. For he knows that God is merciful (Jona 4:2).

Jonah pays the price for the crossing. There is always a price tag attached to the road that leads away from God. The price is the loss of self-respect, the robbery of God's presence and the violation of conscience. Nevertheless, the full price is paid. But if we have paid for everything and lost everything, we will not succeed in achieving our goal. We are thrown out of our own chosen ship into the ocean.

Then God brings us back ashore at His expense and in a ship of His making. The morning of departure can look sunny and beautiful, there is no cloud in the sky. But God can send a storm after the runaway to bring him back to Himself.

Jona 1:4 | The LORD Intervenes

4 The LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up.

Of course, the LORD could have encountered Jonah earlier on. But He lets Jonah go as far as He deems right. It doesn't get out of His hand. He never loses control of a case He has begun. He has given Jonah a task and He wants Jonah to carry it out.

The beginning of the journey must have been very smooth. So smooth, that the gentle swaying of the ship has swayed Jonah asleep. Then it is God's time to intervene. He knows exactly when to intervene. He also has the appropriate means to do so. God sends an obedient servant to follow His disobedient servant. That obedient servant is the wind. From His treasures God sends this servant in favor of His runaway servant (Psa 135:7c; Pro 30:4).

At first sight, a storm does not seem to be favorable. The ship is in danger of being broken up. Jonah and the other persons on board face destruction. But if God uses a storm in the life of His own, we can be sure that the storm will not get out of His hand and that it is a blessing.

It is the grace of God Who seeks His servant and does not let him go in a way of sin for a long time. Sin always brings storms to a person's life or family or to the church; sin never brings rest. It is beneficial to recognize in these storms the call of God by which He wants to awaken us, so that we may do His will again.

Jona 1:5 | Prayer and Action

5 Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried to his god, and they threw the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten [it] for them. But Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down and fallen sound asleep.

It must have been a colorful group of people on board that ship. Superficially viewed their common goal is to ensure that the ship reaches its destination. Through the distress will come to the surface what is in the heart of everyone. Everyone confesses his faith, but it is not a unity of the faith, for every man cries to his own god.

In the same way, it seems that in a given company, everyone delivers his or her share to its success. But when there are storms or setbacks, it brings to light what someone believes. Then everyone has his own belief. We see this in politics, but also in the church. The Word of God is not consulted. Every man acts according to his own view.

The world is in need. Anyone who has an eye for this will try to do something about it according to his own view. At all kinds of conferences that are organized because of the need, people do not get together. Everyone

continues to fight for their own interests. These interests are nourished by an ideology, a philosophy, a religion without faith in Jesus Christ as the Mediator between God and men. The prayer of the sailors is an expression of powerlessness in which a higher power is called upon.

In addition to their individual need which brings them to pray individually, there is also a common acting. Together they throw the cargo overboard. They want to lighten the ship so that it is easier to steer in the storm. But making the ship lighter does not change the intensity of the storm. It rages in full force. Only when the cause of the storm is known it can be calmed down. Thus, man is always busy to make problems bearable and manageable, without wanting to face the cause.

The problem of the ship is sleeping in the hold of the ship. Jonah has fallen into a deep sleep in the careless opinion that he had succeeded in his intention. How could he think that God would stop him at sea and bring him back from his disobedient way?

His sleep is not the sleep of trust, as with the Lord Jesus (Mt 8:24) or Peter (Acts 12:6). His sleep is the sleep of an insensitive conscience (1Thes 5:6). He thinks he is safe. He believes he has succeeded in his aim. But his sleep makes him insensitive to the disaster he is causing to his fellow passengers.

Maintaining one's own self also causes others to end up in misery. This can be applied to the family or the local church. If someone doesn't want his reputation to be damaged and demands his right where he should be tolerant, it is a disaster for the whole family or the church.

Jona 1:6 | Wake Up and Pray!

6 So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps [your] god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish."

What a shame when a pagan must reprimand and call upon a believer to pray. Numerous Christians are completely indifferent to the fact that the world is figuratively on fire. The fate that awaits millions of people to be tormented in hell forever does not bother them. How many Christians aren't concerned about the fact that a family member, their neighbors or their colleague, their fellow pupil is on the way to eternal damnation?

Does it still touch us? “How is it that you are sleeping?”! We gaze at the entertainment that the Internet and television offer us. We roam the world wide web through countless ‘interesting’ things. We appease our conscience that we do not view the most terrible programs or sites. And the precious time passes by and spiritually we slowly dip away and sometimes literally. After a while it turns out that we have sunk into a very deep sleep.

There is not much difference between a deep sleeping and a dead person. Therefore the call must come: “Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you” (Eph 5:14). It is time for a captain to come and wake us up. Shame on us, sleeping that fast, while the need is increasing more and more. Can we do nothing? Don’t we have boldness? Then let us rise up and pray to our God. No one needs a gift to pray. The smallest child can do that.

What is needed is faith. “And without faith it is impossible to please [Him], for he who comes to God must believe that He is and [that] He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb 11:6). Or has our faith in the living God also ended? Does our faith no longer live? Muslims are supposed to pray five times a day; how many Christians do it hardly ever once a day? Let us wake up and pray for our lives and for the lives of those who are with us on board our life ship!

Jona 1:7 | And the Lot Fell on Jonah

7 Each man said to his mate, “Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity [has struck] us.” So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah.

Jonah is awakened. Would he have fulfilled the captain’s call and prayed to God? Or would his conscience have spoken in the remembrance of the LORD, from Whom he is fleeing? It is not mentioned. In any case, he still does not tell what is going on. Jonah is silent for as long as he can, although he knows why the ship is in distress. If people are ashamed, but their own will is still active because it has not yet been judged, a lot of chastisement is needed to bring someone back on the right path.

The sailors see so many unusual things in the storm that they attach the right meaning to it. It is a storm that is the fault of one of those present

on the ship. For Jonah, the storm is a catastrophe coming from the LORD (Amos 3:6b). For the heathen sailors it is a message of some divine justice (cf. Acts 28:4).

Special events often lead to a call to the conscience. God wants all kinds of national or personal disasters to have that effect (cf. Isa 26:9). But nobody on the ship wonders: 'Am I the cause?' It must be someone else. To find out they cast lots.

The casting of lots is often done in the Old Testament (Jos 7:16; 15:1; 1Sam 14:36-42). It also happens one more time in the New Testament before the Holy Spirit is poured out (Acts 1:26). After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we do not hear that the church uses it. That would also be contrary to the way in which God now reveals His will. We have the complete Word of God and His Spirit Who guides into all the truth (Jn 16:13).

After the lot has fallen upon Jonah, it is not possible to remain silent any longer (Pro 16:33).

Jona 1:8 | Accountability Is Asked

8 Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account [has] this calamity [struck] us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?"

The sailors want an explanation from Jonah. They ask about his work, the profession he exercises. Maybe they do so with the thought that there may be something dishonest in it that has stirred the wrath of the gods.

This question can also be asked to us who claim to be Christians. What are we doing? Is that what we do a blessing or a curse to others? That applies to managing a business. Do we do business honestly, do we reward employees honestly, do subordinates get a fair assessment? It also applies to all kinds of other activities, including what we consider to be a hobby or leisure activity. What are we doing, why are we doing it and how?

They also ask Jonah where he comes from. Is there anything wrong in his background? What is his homeland? Who are his fellow countrymen? The answer to these questions can be important to determine what kind of man they have to do with.

These questions can also be applied to us who profess to be Christians. Where do we, as Christians, come from? Do we live out of the fellowship with God? Does that define our actions and the way we go? And is heaven our homeland? Can we say that we are citizens of heaven? And who are our fellow citizens? Are these all the children of God? If we're asked those questions, when we're in a position like Jonah's, we'll feel pretty uncomfortable.

Jona 1:9 | Accountability Is Given

9 He said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."

Only after lots has been cast and questions are asked, Jonah does come up with a statement. He is forced to do so. His explanation is therefore not yet a real repentance for his disobedience. His conscience has not yet been brought into the light of God. That is why the storm has not yet subsided and God must teach him even more.

Jonah acknowledges that he is to blame. He calls himself a Hebrew, a name that the Israelite has among the Gentiles (Gen 39:14,17; 40:15; 1Sam 4:6,9; 14:11). In his confession concerning God, he confesses the LORD as "the God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land". This means that Jonah does not confess God as the God of Israel, the God of one special people. He makes Him known to the sailors, heathen, as he should have done in Nineveh.

With this confession he indirectly condemns his own fleeing. He also says with this that you can't flee from that God.

Jona 1:10 | Impressed

10 Then the men became extremely frightened and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them.

Jonah did not inform them about his being on the run when he boarded, but he did so in his answers to their questions. That his explanation about the LORD God is not a fabrication, is underlined by the circumstances. It filled the sailors with fear. It seems that the disgraceful disobedience

of Jonah makes these heathen more impressed by God than the prophet himself.

A believer can tell with a certain indifference about God's actions with him, while this makes a great impression on people who do not take God into account. When someone says he is punished by God for disobedience, it sometimes makes a deep impression on people who do not know Who God is. That's because those people know by themselves how many things they have done in disobedience. In this way God can even use disobedience from those who profess His Name to impress others of His power.

Of course this does not in any way justify a person's disobedience. And it is also the question of whether someone who is deeply impressed by God's omnipotence also turns to God.

Jona 1:11 | What Should We Do?

11 So they said to him, "What should we do to you that the sea may become calm for us?"—for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy.

Despite the fact that they now know the cause of the storm, the sea is becoming increasingly stormy. The wind does not calm down, but increases even more. Something more needs to be done. It may be that sin is discovered which is the cause of our problems. But it must also be handled properly, otherwise it will get worse and worse.

That is also the case here. Therefore, the sailors continue the examination. They do not want to choose a measure themselves, afraid as they are of the God from Whom Jonah is fleeing. They see in him a culprit, but also a penitent. He is the one who has to indicate what needs to be done.

Jona 1:12 | Pick Me up and Throw Me Into the Sea

12 He said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, for I know that on account of me this great storm [has come] upon you."

It is courageous of Jonah to make this proposal. It is the language of the penitent. Such a person wishes to bear the punishment himself, whatever it may cost him, and not others who are innocent of it. He seeks no apol-

ogy or relief. Without reserve, he takes the blame and justifies God in His actions. He acknowledges the hand of God in what is happening.

Jonah speaks here as a believing Israelite, who knows the solemnity of the righteousness of the holy God from the law and from the history of His people. He bows down under the judgment of God. At the same time, his proposal expresses his confidence in God. With his proposal, he says as much as: 'Just hand me over to God'. He entrusts himself to God when he is no longer in the ship, for he understands it is the wrong place for him.

Jonah is a weak, indeed a very weak picture of the Lord Jesus. Jonah's humiliation is the result of his disobedience. The humiliation of the Lord is the result of His impeccable obedience. Christ offered Himself in perfect obedience to die for others, that they might live.

Something similar as in Jonah is seen in David's attitude after his sin of counting the people (1Chr 21:17). The statements of Jonah and David in which they offer themselves to pay the penalty are beautiful, but they are the result of their own guilt. When the Lord Jesus says: "Behold, I have come ... To do Your will, O God" (Heb 10:7), it is to carry out God's will in complete voluntariness on behalf of utterly corrupt sinners.

Jona 1:13 | Resistance

13 However, the men rowed [desperately] to return to land but they could not, for the sea was becoming [even] stormier against them.

Jonah's offer to throw him into the sea goes too far for the sailors. They do what they can, not to have to take this measure. Although the sailors see that God's wrath rests on Jonah, they are frightened to be the executors of the Divine judgment. They may have been impressed by what Jonah told them. They still look too much at the man in front of them. He is for them the representative of the God about Whom he has spoken. Should they throw him into the sea? They make every effort to prevent that from happening.

The acknowledgment of God's judgment and acting accordingly are two things. Only when a person is totally at the end of his possibilities he will bow before God's judgment. The sailors must also experience this. When

they see that they are not dealing with Jonah, but with the God of Jonah, they turn to Him.

Jona 1:14 | Acknowledgment

14 Then they called on the LORD and said, "We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased."

The actions of the sailors reveal a beautiful character trait, which is a disgrace to Jonah. For they care more about the one life of Jonah than Jonah cares about the life of the hundreds of thousands in a whole city (Jona 4:11). In their confession they state that they acknowledge God's right to life. Although they are not in connection with God, they do not grant themselves the right to take Jonah's life. They pray for forgiveness for what they are going to do.

They call to the LORD because they have heard from Jonah that this is the Name of the God of Jonah. In this way they acknowledge His supremacy. They confess that the LORD acts according to what pleases Him: He has sent the storm and selected the guilty one by the lot.

Therein lies resignation. God never acts at random. He always acts according to His good will, according to His pleasure. This is the expression of His sovereignty. Whoever trusts Him will find in it the strength to act according to His will and to accept His actions.

Jona 1:15 | Obedience and the Result

15 So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging.

The sailors throw Jonah out of the ship, out of their company, into the raging sea that, as it were, calls for the handing over of the transgressor, so that peace and rest may come. We do not read how Jonah felt at that moment. But we can assume that, while he flees from his Master, he is now going to meet that Master as Judge.

God spares the sailors based on their prayer and their act of obedience. Prophetically, when we see the picture of Israel in Jonah, we have here the

picture of what is written in Romans 11, that “their [Israel’s] rejection is the reconciliation of the world” (Rom 11:15a). After Jonah has been thrown into the sea, the sea becomes calm. After the rejection of Israel, the message of salvation goes to the Gentiles.

Jona 1:16 | Fear and Admiration

16 Then the men feared the LORD greatly, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

Suddenly the storm stops. After all that the sailors have already experienced, it makes their impression of the God of Jonah even greater. There is fear and admiration. They want to offer something to the LORD and therefore offer Him a sacrifice. They testify that He is worthy of their thanks and admiration.

Their gratitude is not only something of the moment, they also make vows with regard to the future. They will give Him even more when they have come ashore safely.

With this they rise above what Jacob once promised. Jacob set God’s conditions. If God proved Himself to be the God Who would bring him home safely, *then* Jacob would accept God as his God (Gen 28:20-21). These sailors make vows for Who God has been to them and not as a challenge to God to prove Himself by saving them.

Jona 1:17 | Jonah Saved

17 And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

When Jonah has been thrown into the sea, he does not drown. The LORD takes care of him. He sends a great fish to swallow Jonah. Then the LORD does His work in Jonah. God, Who keeps life in the womb before birth, can also keep a Jonah in the stomach of the fish. The fish swallows Jonah, not to devour him, but to protect him. God saves Jonah because He still wants to use him.

The fact that Jonah spent three days and three nights in the fish can only be explained as a miracle. The Lord Jesus calls Jonah’s stay in the fish a sign

(Mt 12:39). The miracle is not so much that Jonah is swallowed by a fish and comes out alive again. Nor is it a fish made by God especially for that circumstance. God could have made Jonah a super swimmer. God does nothing like that.

The miracle God does here is that He appoints the fish right there and at that time and that Jonah stays for three days in the fish to serve as a sign for the days that the Lord Jesus will be in the tomb. For the Ninevites, Jonah is a man who went through death and resurrection. There is, however, this difference between the Lord Jesus and Jonah: Jonah entered 'the grave' through disobedience, while the Lord came there through His perfect obedience. Jonah is rejected because of his unfaithfulness, while the Lord is rejected because of His faithfulness.

Jonah 2

Introduction

Jonah 1 represents the history of Israel in the history of Jonah. In Jonah 2, in the experiences that Jonah has in the sea and in the stomach of the fish, details are given about experiences that Israel gains. While Jonah is kept in the stomach of the fish, he is also under the disciplining hand of God. That is also the case with Israel among the nations. Jonah's prayer is a prayer of thanks for the saving he has experienced, that he is not swallowed up by the sea, but is alive in the stomach of a fish.

Jona 2:1 | Jonah Prays

| 1 *Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the stomach of the fish,*

The prayer that Jonah prays when he is in the fish shows us much of prayer in general. There is first and foremost the reason for his prayer. Jonah prays because he is in great distress and a hopeless situation. Where is he when he prays? He is in the stomach of a fish.

Secondly, this shows that the way to heaven is always open to any prayer, no matter from where it is sent. Thus Paul and Silas pray from a prison (Acts 16:25).

Thirdly, it is clear to Whom he prays: he prays to the LORD his God, Whom he believes in, with Whom he has a personal relationship.

And fourth, what does he pray? His prayer is not a prayer for salvation, but a confession and thanksgiving for the salvation he received. He speaks to "his God" and a little further on he speaks of "my God" (verse 6). These statements show his trust in God. Despite the fact that he fled from God, he knows that God did not let him go.

Jonah is here a picture of the believing remnant of Israel in the end times when they are in great tribulation and without prospect. The remnant, like Jonah here, can turn to no one but God alone; it can expect help from no other than God alone. God will answer their prayer. He will keep the

remnant of His people through the fire and the water, and be with them therein (Isa 43:2).

Jona 2:2 | In the Depth of Sheol

*2 and he said,
 "I called out of my distress to the LORD,
 And He answered me.
 I cried for help from the depth of Sheol;
 You heard my voice.*

It is striking that Jonah, while praying this prayer in the stomach of the fish, does so in the past tense. This seems to indicate that his prayer refers to his (short) stay in the water and not in the fish. He does not actually talk about the latter. Perhaps we can see it in such a way that his stay in the fish has to be seen as a kind of salvation, or at least the beginning of it. It gives him hope for real salvation. He saw his hopeless situation as already gone by when he was in the fish. His hope for his salvation is therefore clearly expressed in his prayer.

When Jonah was thrown into the raging sea, he thought he was in the depth of Sheol, i.e. the realm of the dead. The place where he was, seemed to him to be the place where they are who have left life and where death is. At the place of death, all self-interest is gone. He has been thrown back on himself. Every resistance is broken. So he is in the right position before God and God can bring him where he needs to be.

He called to God in his distress and was heard. All expressions of his distress are strongly echoed in expressions that we often hear in the book of Psalms. The Psalms express the experiences and feelings of the pious Jew, often when he is in great distress.

A comparison between Jonah and Psalms shows a number of similarities:

Jona 2:2a – Psa 3:4; 120:1

Jona 2:2b – Psa 18:5-6; 30:3

Jona 2:3a – Psa 88:6-7

Jona 2:3b – Psa 42:7

Jona 2:4a – Psa 31:22

Jona 2:4b – Psa 5:7

Jona 2:5a – Psa 69:1b-2

Jona 2:6b – Psa 103:4

Jona 2:7a – Psa 107:5-6; 142:3

Jona 2:8a – Psa 31:6

Jona 2:9a – Psa 69:30; 107:22

Jona 2:9c – Psa 3:8; 37:39

Jonah must have been familiar with the book of Psalms and stored the Psalms in his heart. Now the Spirit can remind him of these parts and can let him quote these. Because Jonah knows them, he can take support and comfort from them. And so Scripture is meant for us (Rom 15:4).

Jona 2:3 | The LORD Has Done It

*3 “For You had cast me into the deep,
Into the heart of the seas,
And the current engulfed me.
All Your breakers and billows passed over me.*

He does not attribute the situation in which he finds himself to what the sailors have done with him (Jona 1:15). Nor does he talk about an accident. No, in what happened to him, he acknowledges God’s actions as a result of his disobedience. *God* had cast him into the deep. The sailors were only the executors of God’s discipline. In the same sense Paul never calls himself a prisoner of Nero or of Rome, but of Jesus Christ.

It is important to look beyond the circumstances and see that God is behind them. Jonah humbles himself under the mighty hand of God (1Pet 5:6-7). Salvation for a soul in need can only come if the hand of God is recognized in it.

What Jonah experiences corresponds to what is written in Psalm 42 (Psa 42:7). There a God-fearing Israelite is speaking who remembers how he used to go to God’s house with the multitude of God’s people. But that is over. He has been driven out of the land. He experiences the chastening

of God which had to come over His unfaithful people as the breakers and billows that pass over him.

So it was with Christ when He was nailed on the cross. Only, He was in distress and misery and among the “breakers and billows” of God’s judgment for the benefit of others because He made Himself one with the sins of others. Because of this He not only *did feel* Himself alone, but He really *was* alone in the three hours of darkness. Then, and only then, He was forsaken by God. Never will this apply to any man except those in hell. Neither did it apply to Jonah in the stomach of the fish.

Jona 2:4 | Expelled

4 “So I said, ‘I have been expelled from Your sight.
Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.’

Jonah says he was expelled from God’s sight, while he himself had chosen to leave the presence of God (Jona 1:3). Here he experiences what this is. The terrible thing about hell is that someone there is expelled from God’s sight. There is nothing more terrible for a man than to be without God. Similarly, the happiness of heaven lies in the fact that someone is close to God. On earth one can feel that God has expelled him, no longer bothering about him. That is a great grief (Psa 31:22; Isa 49:14).

Jonah realizes how awful it is to be away from the presence of God. He longs to be back in it again. Jonah comes from the ten tribes realm. There, under the leadership of Jeroboam I, the people erected their own temples in Bethel and Dan (1Kgs 13:26-33). But they do not count for Jonah, nor for any God-fearing Israelite. Despite the religious confusion he sees only one place of worship and that is Jerusalem. Here he already says in faith that he will see again the temple that stands there.

Jona 2:5 | Fear of Death

5 “Water encompassed me to the point of death.
The great deep engulfed me,
Weeds were wrapped around my head.

Jonah acknowledges that his path of disobedience had brought him to the point of death. He despaired of life. This is the inevitable consequence of

the will of man moving away from God. The God-fearing man also expresses himself in this way in the book of Psalms (Psa 18:5; 69:3).

The faithful remnant will also acquire this experience when it is in the great tribulation. They suffer the disasters that come upon the unbelieving mass of the people because of their sins. They are part of the people, but are repentant and acknowledge their guilt. Therefore the LORD will deliver them from their misery.

Jona 2:6 | The Turning Point

6 *“I descended to the roots of the mountains.
The earth with its bars [was] around me forever,
But You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.*

After his fears of death, it seemed that it was the end of Jonah. At least that’s how he experienced it. He could not sink deeper, and at the low point the door was closed behind him. There was no way back and this seemed to be his final destiny.

This would have been the case if God had not intervened (cf. 1Sam 2:6; Psa 30:3). When all hope for salvation seemed lost, He revived in Jonah the remembrance of Him for Whom no situation is hopeless. In the heart of Jonah his faith in the saving God was revived. He acknowledged in God the source of life, Who gives him back life.

Jona 2:7 | The Way Out

7 *“While I was fainting away,
I remembered the LORD,
And my prayer came to You,
Into Your holy temple.*

We sense how the heart of Jonah comes to rest more and more. Despair is changing more and more into hope, which dawns increasingly in his heart. That hope can never be the result of changed circumstances, because he is still in the stomach of the fish. He has no reference point at all. He is in ink black darkness. He does not know where he is going. More than anyone else has experienced, Jonah experiences how the remembrance of the LORD lifts a person beyond his circumstances.

It looks like that Jonah, precisely because of his stay in the fish, saw that the LORD was working to save him. From that he drew hope. In any case, he was able to breathe for three days because he would of course have drowned in the water otherwise.

He speaks with faith that his prayer has arrived in God's holy temple. This might be the experience of anyone who, in his life, finds himself in a situation in which every way out seems closed. He may know that God is there.

It is God's intention that through such situations we will learn what Paul learned: "seeing no apparent issue, but our way not entirely shut up" (2Cor 4:8b, Darby Translation). When Jonah despaired of life, he remembered the LORD, and prayed to Him. He has seen the *hand* of God in the storm and in the lot, but in his deepest need he looks at God Himself. When prayer comes to God, He helps and saves.

Jona 2:8 | The Big Difference

8 *"Those who regard vain idols
Forsake their faithfulness,*

Jonah has gained a new experience of God's faithfulness, while he had shirked from it by leaving the presence of God. Only God is the source and personification of faithfulness. With his experience, Jonah wants to warn others not to give up the LORD. He ran away from God. That almost ruined him. But God has taken care of him.

Although he is still in the stomach of the fish, he is back with God. Overwhelmed by His faithfulness, he sees the great difference between the living God and the dead, insignificant idols. No vain idol can save. All those who put their trust in something other than God are violating their souls.

Jonah is not an idolater in the usual sense of the word. He is not kneeling before idols of wood and stone. Yet in a sense Jonah is an idolater. He has served himself, he has placed himself at the center. This self-awareness, which has led him to self-willed action, independent of God, has brought him into the greatest misery and deepest need. Now that he has reached this conclusion, he wants to make everyone aware of the folly of such actions.

Jona 2:9 | Salvation Is From the LORD

*9 But I will sacrifice to You
With the voice of thanksgiving.
That which I have vowed I will pay.
Salvation is from the LORD."*

After his warning to whoever wants to hear it, not to serve vain idols, Jonah turns again to the LORD. He will honor Him with sacrifices of praise (Psa 50:23). He will offer the LORD the fruit of his lips (Hos 14:2). His heart is full of gratitude for Who the LORD is. He praises Him for what He has done. What has the LORD done? He has taught His servant an unforgettable lesson, in which He saved him.

Jonah got to know the LORD in a way that would not have been possible otherwise. He also promised the LORD something. What that is, is not mentioned. It is obvious that he promised to carry out the task (cf. Jona 1:16).

The final words of his prayer indicate that he attributes his salvation completely and only to the LORD. He stops struggling and now expects everything from Him.

Jona 2:10 | Back at the Start

10 Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

The confession that the salvation is from the LORD is the moment that the fish vomits Jonah up onto the dry land. It is like the man who is mentioned in Romans 7. He also lives between hope and fear. He longs for living according to God's commandments, and he still does not succeed. Always focused on himself, searching for strength in himself, he becomes increasingly desperate. His total despair is expressed in the words: "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" (Rom 7:24).

These words herald the solution, the salvation. He has said "who" will set me free. That means that he no longer expects it from himself, but from someone else. That Someone is Jesus Christ, as the following verse says:

"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom 7:25a). This confession brings the man, so to speak, from the swamp, in which he sank deeper and deeper, onto the dry land. This dry land is described in Romans 8 as follows: "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).

Now that the disobedient servant has come to full surrender, he is freed from his perilous position. As soon as the LORD commands the fish to do so, it vomits Jonah up. There is no need for a repeated command. Brute beasts carry out an order faster than rationally thinking people.

We don't know where Jonah was put on dry land. But it could have been in the neighborhood of Joppa. From there he had taken the wrong direction. It also fits in with the way God acts when He restores someone. Anyone who has deviated must first return to the point where the deviation started. Often the point of deviation is the moment that a certain sin is allowed in someone's mind without condemning it. After the thought often follows the deed. Then not only the deed should be condemned, but also the thought. What someone allows in his thinking is generally decisive for his behavior.

Jonah 3

Introduction

The word of the LORD comes to Jonah for the second time. He gets the same command as the first time. This time Jonah does not flee for his mission. He goes to Nineveh obediently and brings the preaching as God has commanded him. The whole city comes to repentance and conversion. There is a deep awareness of committed sins and deserved judgment. There is also a deep awareness that the only salvation is to be found in God. Their hope for salvation is not in vain. Whoever goes to God with the mind of the inhabitants of Nineveh, will always be heard by Him.

Jona 3:1 | A Second Chance

| *1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying,*

Jonah receives the word of the LORD the second time. He gets a second chance. This is not only a proof of God's grace but also a proof of His forgiveness. He also could have sent someone else. We also see here the persevering goodness of God for Nineveh.

The LORD does not remind Jonah of his sin. He is not forever unfit to do a service for the LORD because of his sin. Confession and forgiveness often mean that we return to the task that we dropped by our sin. In this way we can show that we have not received the grace of God in vain.

God often gives His servants a second chance. Examples are Peter and John Mark. God is the God of another chance, yet He does not always give an opportunity for a second chance. Sometimes disobedience is of such a character that God cannot go on with such a servant. The man of God from Judah is an example of this (1Kgs 13:21-26).

Jona 3:2 | The Command Is Unchanged

| *2 "Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you."*

Jonah gets a second chance, but no other command. The content of his preaching has not changed. This is because with God “there is no variation or shifting shadow” (Jam 1:17b). Also, nothing has changed about the wickedness of the people in Nineveh.

It is important that the preaching of the gospel and of the truth in general is not in any way altered or adapted. It is a trick of the devil who, if he can’t stop the truth, always will try to distort it.

Jona 3:3 | Jonah Goes

3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three days’ walk.

There is now no resistance anymore with Jonah. He obeys and sets off (cf. Mt 21:28-29). This is the obedience that should characterize every servant (cf. 1Kgs 17:5). God alone knows the right place and the right time and the right word. Jonah can rightly say with the Psalmist: “Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word” (Psa 119:67).

Nineveh must have had between six hundred thousand and one million inhabitants. God’s heart goes out to each of these people. He does not want anyone to perish, but for all to come to repentance (2Pet 3:9b; 1Tim 2:4). He cares about all people in the whole world. Jonah is a sign for the Ninevites (Lk 11:30). They must have heard what happened to him. Hence he is a sign for them. They can see in him the punishing, but also the saving God. He himself was saved by the LORD and can now offer this salvation also to Nineveh.

Jonah is here a type of and reference to the Lord Jesus as the One risen from the dead. Christ is also preached as a Savior to the Gentile world only after He had died and risen.

Jona 3:4 | The Preaching

4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day’s walk; and he cried out and said, “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown.”

Jonah is alone, facing an enormous wickedness. He has not organized a campaign, didn’t place advertisements, didn’t hire famous speakers. Peter

and Paul also work like Jonah. They all trust only in God and the power of His Word.

After Jonah has walked one day into the city, he must have arrived in the city center at the moment he begins to preach. The appearance and preaching of the stranger Jonah must have caused a great sensation. Probably never before has anyone pointed out the sins of the city, and made known a judging God. It may also have been noticed that his preaching is without any self-interest. He does not preach to become popular. That's also not the content of his message. Neither does he reduce his hard message to a poor substitute.

Fearless his voice shouts through the streets of Nineveh and calls out the words he was told by the LORD. The preaching of judgment is in itself a proof of the grace of God. The announcement of the judgment is not yet the execution of it. Nineveh is even given a postponement of forty days. In that period they can show what effect the preaching has on them.

It is a period of testing. That is also what the number forty represents. It is the number of testing. This is also evident from other places where this number occurs (Gen 7:17; Exo 24:18; Num 14:25,34; 1Sam 17:16; 1Kgs 19:8; Mt 4:2; Acts 1:3).

The way in which this judgment is carried out shows that it is a radical judgment. To be overthrown is a devastation including the foundation. What was announced to Nineveh, happened to Sodom and Gomorrah.

Jona 3:5 | The Power of God's Word

5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.

Jonah's preaching is short. The original text contains only five words. But what a mighty preaching! Nowhere in the Bible we find a result of God's words as here with the inhabitants of Nineveh. The whole city comes to faith in God! The miracle that takes place here is many times greater than that of the fish that had swallowed Jonah.

Jonah is a sign. But the inhabitants do not concern themselves with Jonah. They concern themselves with what he says, which means with God. They

received the word of the preaching of God and “accepted [it] not [as] a word of men, but [for] what it really is, the word of God” (1Thes 2:13).

They all repent, from the oldest to the youngest, without exception. They believe what God says. They acknowledge that He has the right to judge them and that it will be right if He does so. When God is believed on His word, He is honored. In return He honors such faith with the answer of His grace.

Jonah’s preaching makes a deep impression and not just a shallow one. This is evidenced by the fast that is called. All entertainment is banned. They focus exclusively on God. They show their inner state of dismay by putting on sackcloth. The sackcloth is not camouflage, but the real expression of dismay. They realize the seriousness of their situation. Judgment is imminent. The soul that has come to this awareness also realizes that there is only one way to escape this judgment, and that is through humiliation and confession and hope for the grace of God.

It is about the judgment of God, not of the LORD. LORD is the Name in connection with His covenant people. The name “God” speaks of His sovereignty and is connected with His creation. The sailors use the name ‘LORD’ after being taught about it by Jonah (Jona 1:14).

“From the greatest to the least of them” can refer to age or body length. It can also refer to the degree of being sinners (cf. Rev 20:12a). All admit themselves to be sinners in any case, and acknowledge the righteousness of God’s judgment. The great sinners do not feel too great, as if there is no grace for them; the small sinners do not feel too small, as if they do not need grace.

Because the men of Nineveh listen, they will judge the proud Jews of the days of the Lord Jesus. The Jews do not listen to the message of Him Who is greater than Jonah (Mt 12:41).

Jona 3:6 | Arising From the Throne

6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered [himself] with sackcloth and sat on the ashes.

The effect of the preaching is so spontaneous that no one waits for a word from the king, but they put on sackcloth (verse 5). But the king does not stay behind. He joins the general mourning. His first reaction is that he arises from his throne. With this he expresses as it were, that he renounces his authority because of the abuse he has made of it. This act also includes the acknowledgment of the authority of a Superior.

We also see this aspect with other kings who rise from their throne, such as Ehud (Jdg 3:20) and Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 3:24). As long as man thinks he can control his own life, his own 'I' is still on the throne. The first result of someone who is convinced of God's authority over his life is that he arises from his 'throne'.

The king of Nineveh does not stop there. The next thing he does is to lay aside his robe. With this he says, as it were, that he has lost all his dignity. Finally, he also covers himself with sackcloth. He joins the people in their mourning. He acknowledges that there is no regard of persons with God: "For there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:22b-23).

Then he goes one step further. He takes his place on the ashes, the place that speaks of the deepest humiliation and death (Job 42:6; Psa 22:16). As the head of the people he is aware of his greater responsibility in leading the way into sin. From this low point, he starts a different way of governing the people. Without still being aware of it, he leads the people back to God.

Jona 3:7 | A Command of Life

7 He issued a proclamation and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste a thing. Do not let them eat or drink water.

It seems as if this command by the king and his ministers is leading the people to ruin. Not eating and not drinking will result in death. But that is the appearance that deceives. On the contrary, it is an order to life. Whoever takes the place of death before God, whoever acknowledges to be dead before God, is given life.

Everything shows that the people take Jonah's message seriously. There is no delay, on the contrary, there is haste. The command calls for an immediate conversion of the sins to which they have surrendered and over which God's judgment now looms. The life in hedonism and debauchery is given up. The most essential necessities of life are renounced. Even the animals are withheld from any food.

This expresses how much man and animal are connected in the curse that hangs over creation as a result of man's sin (Joel 1:18,20). Man and animal are also united in expressing the grief over sin and the longing to be set free from the curse, from the slavery to corruption (Rom 8:19-25). Man and animal will share in that liberation (Psa 36:6-7). We see in the last verse of this book that God also takes the animals into account (Jona 4:11).

Jona 3:8 | Calling on God

8 But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth; and let men [literally them] call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands.

According to verse 5, all have already covered themselves with sackcloth. Their appearance reflects their inner change. But also the beasts must be covered with a sackcloth. They share in the grief of the people. Think of the horses in front of a hearse that are covered with black rugs.

It is assumed that the calling of beasts does not belong in the biblical text, because beasts neither call to God, nor repent. Of course, beasts cannot repent, but beasts can call to God, and God hears them too. They will do this even more when they do not receive food and drink (Job 39:3; Psa 104:21).

The deep awareness of the impending disaster and its righteousness is evident in the call to cry to God 'earnestly'. A general, thoughtless spoken prayer has no effect. Nor is it the expression of someone who is convinced of the state of emergency in which he finds himself.

Those who are convinced of this state of emergency will do everything in their power to bring about a change in their fate. The actions of God that are noticed to work this will result in God being constantly faced with prayers. The Lord Jesus Himself invites such persistent, continuous prayer in the parable of a widow who persistently appeals to an unjust judge (Lk

18:1-8). He expresses this parable in response to the emergency situation He has painted in the verses before (Lk 17:20-37).

Conversion only occurs when someone honestly says to God, for example: 'I have lied.' This is called confessing the sins. Out of conviction, such a person agrees that he is indeed not to be trusted. It is the acknowledgment that it is not good inside, in the heart. There is also the acknowledgment that such sin deserves the punishment of God, that it is righteous if God throws man into hell for his sins. Conversion is therefore not a superficial matter, but a profound work.

It is not about feeling, but about conscience that must come in the light of God. We could say that repentance is that we go to God to condemn ourselves before Him. It also means confessing to Him that there was no obedience to Him so far and that life was thoroughly wrong as a result. There will also be repentance for living in this way so far and that one distances oneself from it.

These aspects of conversion can be seen in the inhabitants of Nineveh. We see the repentance to God in earnestly calling to God. We also see the call that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands, that is, to distance himself from the former walk and trade, "way" and "hands". With 'violence', one could think of the many extortions that the inhabitants of Nineveh have apparently been guilty of.

Jona 3:9 | Who Knows ...

9 Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish."

The whole city feels that it is possible that God will not execute His judgment, although Jonah did not speak about it. There is the general sense of God's goodness. The expression "who knows" makes their mind clear. They demand no forgiveness and claim no mercy. In their confession there is no sacrifice or anything they promise or offer God, to appease Him with it, to earn something. Salvation is on the basis of faith in Christ alone and not on the basis of works.

Jona 3:10 | And He Did Not Do It

10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do [it].

Just as the *wickedness* has risen from Nineveh to God before (Jona 1:2), so now *repentance* rises. God does not only hear their calls, He also sees their change. They produce fruit worthy of the repentance (Mt 3:8). That fruit is that they turn from their wicked way. No animal sacrifices are brought, but they bring the sacrifice of a broken spirit and contrite heart (Psa 51:17).

Their change leads God to change His mind. He relents concerning His earlier plan and does not execute it. God's relenting never has to do with acknowledging a wrong deed. God never does anything wrong. The element of regret about wrongdoing is not present here. If God relents, it means that in His government He comes back from something He had in mind, but changes it when He sees people behaving differently.

God can therefore relent in the sense that He comes back to an intention to bless or punish man if the ways of man give cause to so (cf. Jer 18:7-8; 26:2-3). This shows that man is not a puppet and God is not an adamant God.

Jonah 4

Introduction

If the book of Jonah would have been nothing more than a narrative of a man, then the story would have ended with Jonah 3. Could there be a more beautiful ending with the climax of the conversion and salvation of Nineveh? What a victory for God and for Jonah! But the great (anti)climax is yet to come and it comes in this chapter. That climax is the lesson about the narrow mindedness of man – even if that man is a servant of God – and about the immense greatness of God’s heart, both for Nineveh and Jonah and ... for me and you.

Jona 4:1 | Jonah’s Reaction to God’s Goodness

| 1 *But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.*

Only if we don’t know ourselves well, we can’t imagine that Jonah’s attitude here is possible. He has forgotten his stay in the fish. Here we see in practice what we possibly have already discovered ourselves, that no experience of God’s goodness will ever improve the flesh. The flesh is so hopelessly depraved that only the death and resurrection of Christ can bring about a change. This change is not an improvement of the flesh, but the provision of a new nature to live through it.

Jonah begrudges Nineveh the forgiveness of God which he himself experienced so particularly after his own disobedience (cf. Mt 18:23-35). If there is “joy in heaven over one sinner who repents” (Lk 15:7), how the joy there must have been exuberant over the conversion of a whole city. But Jonah does not share in that joy. On the contrary. He would have preferred to see hundreds of thousands of people die rather than his reputation be damaged. He has no control over his own mind. It is the spirit of the Pharisees who also could not bear that the Lord Jesus ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners either (Lk 15:2).

Jona 4:2 | The Second Prayer of Jonah

2 He prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my [own] country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.

This prayer of Jonah is very different from what he prayed in the fish. This time it is a complaint. It is not a prayer in accordance with God, it is a wrong prayer (cf. Jam 4:3). He accuses God of being how He is and because of His actions. Herein lies the pride of Jonah. He thinks he could govern the world better than God. He tells God what occupied him all this time about God and that this was the reason for his runaway. He seems to hold it up to God in a way that he tells Him something He didn't know.

Jonah reveals himself here. He, and this applies to man in general, cannot bear the grace God grants others as long as he still considers himself important. The person who is filled with his own importance is merciless and cruel. Not only does he begrudge others compassion, but he grants them that they perish.

Jonah here is reminiscent of the eldest son in Luke 15. He is that son's spiritual twin brother (Lk 15:28-30). Jonah reproaches God that He is as He really is and that He does not correspond to how Jonah thinks He should be. The characteristic shown by Jonah here is more common among religious people than we sometimes suspect. It explains why those who boast of their devotion to Scripture maintain doctrines that clearly contradict what God has revealed of Himself. An example of this is sectarianism.

Jonah differs from the slave about whom the Lord Jesus speaks in a parable, who found his Lord a hard master and therefore did not go to work (Mt 25:24). But there is also a similarity and that is that in both cases reproaches are made to the Lord because He does not correspond to the natural taste of His servant.

Jona 4:3 | Take My Life From Me

3 Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."

In Jonah 2 he prayed for the salvation of his life, but life no longer makes sense to him if his word is not fulfilled to the letter. Elijah also once prayed to die (1Kgs 19:4). While Elijah is the discouraged prophet who sees that his message remains without result, Jonah is a prophet who is angry precisely because of the expected result of his preaching.

Paul's desire to go to the Lord was quite different. He was not tired of life, but he longed for the Lord Himself. Yet he agreed to continue to live for the sake of the believers, to serve them (Phil 1:23-25).

Jona 4:4 | A Question From the LORD to Jonah

| 4 The LORD said, *"Do you have good reason to be angry?"*

We see not only the grace of God toward His servant, but also His tremendous patience with him. God does not speak a word of reproach, or it should be contained in the question. But more than a reproach we hear in the question how God tries to free Jonah from his egoism. The LORD wants to put the anger of Jonah and his sinful discontent in the right light, His light. To this end, He asks His question. Every question He asks has a purpose.

If the LORD were as Jonah wished He were, it would have meant the end of Jonah. The LORD would then have judged him, for morally he was now on the level of Nineveh. They defied God before they were converted. Jonah defies Him here, too.

The conversation that the LORD enters into with Jonah we also see in Luke 15. There is an eldest son who begrudges the grace with which the father has received back home the youngest son. The father talks to the eldest son, to involve him in what has moved his father heart (Lk 15:31-32).

Jona 4:5 | Jonah, the Observer

| 5 Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city.

Jonah does not answer God's question. He remains stuck in his own views about God and ignores God's question. His answer is to build a shelter

from where he can oversee the city and await the fate which will hit the city (cf. Gen 19:27). By leaving the city, Jonah places himself outside the work of God. He is alone there, while the inhabitants of Nineveh will gladly have housed him.

Jonah obviously does not know the depth and authenticity of the conversion of the inhabitants of Nineveh. In any case, he does not know God's heart. He is not aware of God's goodness with regard to what is happening in Nineveh, because he has closed himself off from God's goodness. There is no room in his heart for this. Instead of his heart being filled with joy because a whole city has been converted, his heart is filled with his own reputation.

Probably few of us are aware of what a strong place our own 'I' has until something occurs that affects our personal dignity. At that moment we reveal which spirit fills us. There is more of the 'Jonah spirit' in us than we want to admit. How little space is given to the Spirit of the Lord in us. Jonah cries, as it were, about the loss of his reputation at the expense of the conversion of the city of Nineveh, while the Lord wept when He saw that the city of Jerusalem was unrepentant (Lk 19:41).

Jona 4:6 | A Plant Grows Up

6 So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant.

The name "LORD God" does not often appear in the Bible, except in Genesis 2-3. This name is the transition from "LORD" in verse 4 to "God" in verse 7. The LORD, Who answers the prophet's complaint, is also the Creator-God Who makes a plant grow in a miraculous way. The name "LORD God" refers to His special relationship with Jonah to whom He reveals Himself in His creative power to win His favor. He wants to deliver Jonah from his discomfort. God is so concerned about His servant that He is concerned about his wellness and therefore He lets a plant grow at amazing speed.

In verse 1 Jonah is angry, now he is extremely happy. It is the only time we read of Jonah's happiness. His happiness does not reach the height of the

joy in heaven over the conversion of so many people. It is a selfish, shabby happiness about his own comfort. He focuses more on his own convenience than on the interests of people who would perish. His gladness is as selfish as his discomfort.

He is not aware of the miracle of God in this and even less does he thank Him for it. It is clear from God's later statement that He, with the joy He gave Jonah with the plant, wanted to point out to him His own joy because of Nineveh's conversion and saving.

Jona 4:7 | A Worm

7 But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered.

Here it is not the "LORD God", but "God", the Creator. Here God appoints "a worm". Thus, as the LORD God has appointed a plant in the previous verse, so in the next verse He appoints as God a scorching east wind, and in Jonah 1 as the LORD He appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah (Jona 1:17). God appoints nature according to His pleasure.

Nature, His creation, is at His disposal. In all cases, nature immediately obeys God's command to the shame of man over whom God can dispose as well. This is all the more embarrassing when it comes to a man who says that he puts himself at the disposal of God.

Jona 4:8 | Repetition of the Request to Die

8 When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with [all] his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life."

When the sun comes up, Jonah painfully feels the loss of the plant. The miracle of the growth of the plant did not lead him to God. He rejoiced in the pleasure he had of it. Now that he has to miss the enjoyment of it as suddenly as he has received it, he turns to God, but not to confess his rebellion to Him. Instead, he says once again that life no longer makes sense to him (verse 3). Egoism is a stubborn evil.

We are no different. In our case, the comfort with which we are surrounded can have the function of a miraculously grown up plant. We enjoy sitting in its shade and measure life around us with the ideas we have about God. Just like Jonah, these are ideas about how we think God should be and act, and not about how God really is. Instead of complaining that not everything in our lives goes as we like, we had better be grateful that we do not get everything we deserve.

If our 'miracle plant' is taken away, it can also happen that we grieve more about it than about the perishing of the people around us. This happens when we are more interested in our own conveniences than in the things God is interested in. When our interests are not parallel to those of God, our feelings go up and down with the prosperity and luxury we enjoy or miss.

Jona 4:9 | Again the Question and Its Answer

9 Then God said to Jonah, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death."

Again God asks whether his anger is justified. The first time God asks this (verse 1), we read no answer from Jonah. This time Jonah answers. With great emphasis he says that he has good reason to be angry. Jonah is not tuned to heaven. He does not agree with God, just as Peter once refuses a command from the Lord and says: "By no means, Lord" (Acts 10:14).

Jonah has, as it were, closed the door of Nineveh with a bang behind him. That angry he was after completing the task that the LORD had forced him to do despite all his resistance. God knew all that. Jonah's anger has increased over time. This is because he did not judge the sin of bitterness in himself. In such cases, bitterness overgrows the whole of one's emotional life. Everything is then seen from this bitterness. The ability to distinguish between good and evil – for that is what God asks for – is lost.

Jonah's answer is no surprise to God. But perhaps we are surprised about his answer. Perhaps we wonder in amazement how it is possible that a servant of God is so stubbornly holding on to his conviction. Then there is still a lot to learn for us. A mirror is held up here before the face of anyone who receives a task from the Lord.

We see here a proof of the enormous grace of God, Who wants to teach His sulking servant yet a lesson. Did Jonah learn it? There is a much more important question: Am I willing to learn that lesson?

Jona 4:10 | The Lesson

10 Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and [which] you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight.

Here it becomes clear why God has created such a fast-growing plant. If it had been a slow growing plant, Jonah should have cared for it and watered it. But Jonah did not have to make any effort for the growth of the plant. He had no personal relationship with it.

God has a personal relationship with the inhabitants of Nineveh, that is, they are His creatures. He made His sun rise over them and made it also to rain over them (Mt 5:45). He has given them rain from heaven and fruitful seasons (Acts 14:16-17). Through Jonah He warned them. Only with people who are in hell does God have no relationship at all anymore.

The lesson is that we are more interested in our own convenience, which has fallen into our lap like that, than in the need of crowds of lost souls on whom God is constantly working to lead them to conversion. It is about God's creatures that live in darkness and will die if to them is not told about the Savior.

Jonah felt sorry for the plant, which had a life span of one day. But he had no compassion for a hundred and twenty thousand immortal, precious souls of children alone (verse 11). Therefore: Away with all pride, selfishness and self-interest! With Paul we must learn to say: 'I am nothing' (2Cor 12:11).

Jona 4:11 | Sharing in the Compassion of God

11 Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know [the difference] between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

With the words “should I” God points with emphasis to Himself in His great compassion. He is moved with compassion. We see God’s compassion in the Lord Jesus with regard to the spiritual needs of the people (Mt 9:36) and with regard to their physical needs (Mt 14:14). But the disciples do not share in His feelings (Mt 14:15).

Jeremiah did share God’s feelings about Gentiles. We hear how God is concerned about Moab and how Jeremiah shares these feelings (Jer 48:31; Isa 15:5; 16:11). And how far away is Jonah from the feelings of the Lord Jesus about Jerusalem: “When He approached [Jerusalem], He saw the city and wept over it” (Lk 19:41).

Would the king of Nineveh have known how many children there were? The LORD knows it exactly. There are more than 120,000 persons in Nineveh who do not know the difference between their right hand and left hand, it means these are children. This does not mean that the children are innocent, but that the extent of their responsibility is limited. They often cannot yet distinguish between truth and falsehood. It makes it clear, that also in the heathen world, God does not let children die for the sins of their parents (Deu 24:16). God is moved about the fate of children, He is greatly interested in them.

The animals are also dear to Him. He is the righteous One Who has regard for the life of His animals (Pro 12:10a).

Jonah’s answer to God’s question is not in Scripture. The judgement seat will make his reaction clear. God has the last word. The sudden end of the book makes its contents and lessons all the more impressive.

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